

Crisis in Epideixis: Ronald Reagan's State
of the Union Addresses as Epideictic Successes
and Deliberative Failures

AN HONOR'S THESIS

by

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I. The Nature of the Critical Problem

On January 8, 1790, George Washington pioneered the constitutional duty of addressing Congress when he delivered his First State of the Union Message.¹ In 1801, Thomas Jefferson broke the "precedent" of speaking directly to Congress by allowing his State of the Union Message to be read to Congress by a clerk.² This written practice established by Jefferson continued until 1913 when Woodrow Wilson personally appeared on Capitol Hill to deliver his address to an astonished audience.³ Since that strategic departure, the State of the Union Address has been an important mode of oral political rhetoric. Its importance to the contemporary critic of political discourse should not be underestimated.

The State of the Union Address is vital to the rhetorical critic. Initially, the speech has an important source. Obviously, the words of the individual occupying our nation's highest office are crucial from a rhetorical standpoint. Secondly, the State of the Union message has a large and important audience. It is now given to both bodies of Congress, members of the president's cabinet, important judicial leaders, and a prime-time national television audience as well as interested international leaders viewing from abroad. Clearly, the address receives much attention -- before, during, and after the event. In addition, the speech involves important subject matter. In reporting on the state of the union, the president

must deal with the most pressing of domestic issues and the most troubling of foreign concerns. The crucial content of this mode of discourse is evidenced by the fact that "almost every significant event and policy in the country's history is told of or foreshadowed in these messages."⁴ Finally, the State of the Union Address is important symbolically. The tradition of our leader annually addressing Congress and the nation on the condition of our affairs is one of the most entrenched political and rhetorical phenomena in the United States. From any perspective, the State of the Union Address is important to the evaluator of rhetoric.

Despite the significance of the address, little has been written to analyze, define, and explain it.⁵ This lack of rhetorical analysis of State of the Union messages is unfortunate because they are inherently problematic. Since the constitution places no limits upon what a president may say in his annual speech⁶, a president is free to use the occasion as he sees fit. This latitude given to the presidential rhetor is especially alarming considering the apparent functional duality of the State of the Union Address. The critical problem becomes the discernment of the "proper" function of the address -- to decide whether the message is intended to meet deliberative or epideictic purposes.

Aristotle in Rhetoric first distinguished between deliberative rhetoric (which concerns itself with policy and legislation) and epideictic rhetoric (ceremonial speeches delivered on special occasions). The deliberative address of

judicial or legislative origin is usually "more narrowly argumentative and decision oriented" as it directs itself "toward more specific policies and goals."⁷ Sharply contrasting this type of rhetoric is the epideictic speech. Karlyn Kohrs Campbell in The Rhetorical Act offered numerous characteristics of this genre: commemoration of the occasion, poetic and figurative language, psychologically appealing supporting materials which reflect cultural values, and a ritualistic rather than logical development.⁸ Other authors have given related descriptions of the epideictic: a speech of praise and blame (Chase 1961), a speech preparatory to some action which is not made explicit (Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969), and a speech which has a performative nature constituting an end in itself (Beale 1978).⁹ Another essential difference between deliberative and epideictic rhetoric is the nature of the audience involved in each type. Speeches requiring the audience to judge (in a policy sense) are deliberative; speeches calling upon the audience to be spectators are epideictic.¹⁰ To exemplify the contrast explained above, one would offer the deliberative Congressional speech from a Senator supporting a mandatory sentencing bill and the epideictic Fourth of July address delivered by a patriotic American before an interested group of on-lookers. Unfortunately, the distinction between epideictic and deliberative rhetoric is not always that clear. A case in point is the State of the Union address, which has both a deliberative and an epideictic nature.

Article II, Section 3 of our Constitution mandates that a president "give to the Congress information on the State of the Union" and to recommend "such measures as he shall judge necessary and expedient." From this wording alone the deliberative nature of the State of the Union address becomes clear. The Founding Fathers "clearly expected a plain report on the state of our affairs"¹¹ and direction in courses of legislative action. One author defines the speech as "an explicit attempt by the president to influence the perceived salience of selected issues in the public mind and among members of Congress."¹² The New York Times recently noted that a president uses the speech "to define his legislative agenda."¹³ Ronald Reagan, like his predecessors, had the opportunity to use the address to "set an agenda for the nation's policy making."¹⁴ These predecessors often realized that opportunity. In 1823 the president argued for the Monroe Doctrine; Theodore Roosevelt used his address to push trust-busting legislation; and Woodrow Wilson established his Fourteen Points for Peace in the 1918 State of the Union address.¹⁵

One of Ronald Reagan's chief speech writers echoed the deliberative nature of the address: "The State of the Union is the most comprehensive speech a President gives It has the most fact-checking and negotiating-of-priorities of any speech. On the other hand, it's the least 'speechy' because of the laundry list nature it takes on. There is less room for rhetoric It's more of a paper and less of a speech."¹⁶ William Safire agreed with the idea that the State of the Union has no

room for flashy rhetoric because "a message to Congress is necessarily laden with programmatic weight."¹⁷ A comparison to the more epideictic Inaugural Address illuminates the uniqueness given to the State of the Union address as a specific policy document:

These messages, far more than the Inaugural Addresses, foretell, and frequently outline, momentous coming events and policies in our political, social, and military history. The Inaugurals are, to a considerable extent, show pieces splashed on a broad canvas. Far more history-in-the-making is wrapped up in the State-of-the-Union Messages, which, with their specific content, show the Presidents in action.¹⁸

All in all, these ideas support the deliberative nature of the address as a policy speech separated Constitutionally from exclusive epideictic ceremony. However, the speech is also "the one speech by the President that occurs every year at the same time and in the same place, with the same audience, and with the same ritual introductions, so that a sort of frame is placed around it which connects it to the past and encourages recollection and comparison."¹⁹ This nature of the State of the Union address introduces the duality of the speech.

The ritualistic characteristic of the State of the Union address is indisputable. Begun in 1790 by George Washington, there have been only two breaks in the tradition in one hundred and ninety-eight years of presidential succession (Harrison, who died one month after taking office; and Garfield, who was assassinated).²⁰ Ronald Reagan, in his 1982 State of the Union speech, referred to his "duty as old as our republic itself" (1982 State of the Union speech, paragraph 2). In 1984, he spoke of the "time-honored tradition" (1984,1) brought by the

occasion. The convention of holding the event annually adds considerable splendor to the policy obligation. Writers have acknowledged the State of the Union address as a "ceremonial occasion"²¹ and as "one of the majestic occasions of national and even world politics."²² Some refer to "the grandeur of the ritual."²³ Clearly, it is much more than an address of policy.

The State of the Union message's epideictic nature can also be identified in terms of the characteristics discussed previously. Campbell's characterization of poetic and figurative language within epideictic rhetoric surely applies to the State of the Union address. The speech usually contains language which is "gripping" and "electric"²⁴-- often in the form of "stirring quotes from past presidents."²⁵ Edward Boykin, in the preface to his anthology of State of the Union messages, noted that many of these "eloquent" speeches contained "words that often glow like jewels."²⁶ Secondly, the duty to assess our nation often calls for "praise and blame" rhetoric consonant with the analysis of Chase. In addition, the State of the Union address is truly as much a "performance" of our nation's leader on national television as a policy rendition to Congress. Finally, although the primary audience is reasonably considered to be Congress, few would dispute the fact that the president is also addressing millions of "spectators" at home watching their television screens. Clearly, then, the State of the Union address also has an epideictic nature.

Given this duality, it is reasonable to conclude that a president must utilize epideictic as well as deliberative rhetoric in this situation. In a sense, however, the deliberative nature of the State of the Union address seems predominate. There is essentially no reason for the pomp and ceremony of the occasion without the constitutional mandate to report and to recommend to Congress upon matters of policy. The deliberative nature of the address is a priori; without it, the epideictic nature becomes almost unimportant. It seems that deliberative renditions of our nation's condition can stand on their own constitutionally while exclusively epideictic performances cannot. In other words, a president who neglects the epideictic function of the address is merely considered boring; while a president who neglects the deliberative function may be criticized for failing to meet a Constitutional requirement.

At any rate, the State of the Union Address is neither exclusively deliberative nor exclusively epideictic in nature. Of course, this problem is not unique to State of the Union messages. Since it is one type of discourse which is functionally neither fish nor fowl, the genre is in need of analysis. Many methods of rhetorical criticism could be employed in order to better understand this mode of discourse. One method would be to undertake a case study of a successful rhetorical president and his State of the Union messages. In order to do this, a model for textual analysis is needed. The model I have

chosen for this thesis focuses upon the nature of epideictic rhetoric.

In order to analyze the State of the Union Address in terms of epideictic rhetoric, the model of Celeste Michelle Condit can be employed as she presented it in Communication Quarterly.²⁷ For Condit, "epideictic rhetoric can be located by its tendency to serve three functional pairs"²⁸ -- definition/understanding, shaping/sharing, and display/entertainment. The first terms in each set refer to the function for the speaker and the latter terms to the function for the audience. The first pair in the triad, definition/understanding, "refers to the power of epideictic to explain the social world."²⁹ In this sense, a speaker will define and explain issues which are troubling to the audience in terms of shared values and common beliefs. The new understanding acquired by the audience will comfort them and make the issue less threatening.

The second pair, shaping/sharing, refers to the ability of epideictic rhetoric to unify the audience as the speaker reformulates the shared heritage of the group. The speaker will reiterate core values and communal beliefs in order to renew the myths and symbols which bond the homogeneous group. In this sense of unity, epideictic rhetoric must be non-divisive, in contrast to deliberative rhetoric which "pits two sides against each other."³⁰ As Condit comments, "In epideictic, such a focus on partial interests is anathema."³¹

Finally, the display/entertainment pair reflects the epideictic invitation for a speaker to display eloquence. After such a display, the audience is entertained "in a most humane manner."³² This cathartic notion of epideictic rhetoric renders the performance an end in itself.

Condit's model of epideictic rhetoric can be used to thoroughly examine a subset of the State of the Union genre. The chosen subset for this thesis is the first six annual messages of Ronald Wilson Reagan, which span from 1982 to 1987. Condit's functional pairs can be used to locate the epideictic rhetoric within Reagan's State of the Union speeches. Of course, Condit's model could also be used to locate epideictic elements within a deliberative address. However, the functional pairs which Condit postulates do tend to characterize predominantly epideictic rhetoric. Therefore, speeches which emphasize these functions will be primarily epideictic in nature. In using this model to identify the epideictic elements of this subset, much can be learned not only about the genre of the State of the Union Address, but also about Ronald Reagan as a rhetor. In essence, this method should help one to answer the critical problem.

II. Epideictic Successes

A. Define/Understand Functions

Ronald Reagan often explained problematic issues which troubled the nation in terms of shared and accepted values. In doing so, the audience was comforted by their new understanding of the problems. This comforting of the audience was also achieved through Reagan's optimistic tone and attitude in presenting the State of the Union address. His positive outlook reassured members of the audience who may have been troubled by the condition of the nation. An analysis of specific audience discomforts and Reagan's handling of those problems will show his epideictic success in terms of Condit's first functional pair.

Reagan often had to deal with economic troubles. For example, with a severe recession in 1982 and 1983, the audience for Reagan's first two addresses was understandably concerned about economic problems. Reagan initially avoided the trouble wrought by President Ford's truthful observation that "The State of the Union is not good" by defining the crisis in terms of a hopeful future: "In the near future, the State of the Union and the economy will be better" (1982,30). Assuring the population that "this time, however, things are different" (1982, 14); Reagan proclaimed that the economy will pull "out of its slump" and America will be back on "the road to prosperity" (1983, 29). Reagan redefined the troubling economy in terms of a test of

American spirit: "Let it be said of us that we, too, did not fail; that we, too, worked together to bring America through difficult times ... that we met the test and preserved ... the sacred flame of liberty" (1982, 104). Apparently, the audience was supposed to adopt the courage of the President's words from his optimistic portrayal of the situation and be comforted knowing that the troubles were short-term. In other words, Reagan transcended specific economic discomfort by appealing to optimism and individual courage in the face of tough times.

When the recession continued into 1983, Reagan again utilized the "test" metaphor by labeling unemployment as a "domestic challenge" (1983, 46) instead of as a domestic problem. In fact, unemployment became such a troubling issue for the public in 1983 that Reagan's image became tainted by "unfairness" and a lack of compassion.³³ Initially, Reagan dealt with these fears by defining an economic state in terms of other positive indicators. Citing gains in lowering the inflation rate (1983, 21), in housing starts (1983, 22), and in "upsurges in productivity" (1983, 23) Reagan tried to comfort an audience unsure of the economic future. Secondly, Reagan employed the shared value of compassion by offering the needy and suffering rhetorical assurances: "For too many of our fellow citizens -- farmers, steel and auto workers, lumbermen, black teenagers, and working mothers -- this is a painful period. We must do everything in our power to bring their ordeal to an end" (1983, 3). By remaining positive, redefining the situation in terms of a test of American strength, and by verbally assuring the worried

audience, Reagan attempted to comfort his listeners with epideictic rhetoric.

There was also much public dismay over Reagan's large defense budgets in the wake of huge projected budget deficits and social program cuts. Reagan confronted the troubled public by appealing to the common values of peace and freedom. Addressing the issue in 1984, Reagan chided "we dare not shirk our responsibility to keep America free, secure, and at peace" (1984, 22). By defining the issue in terms of liberty rather than guns, Reagan implicitly argued that those against defense spending were also against freedom. The same position was voiced by Reagan in the following year's address: "Spending for defense is investing in things that are priceless -- peace and freedom" (1985, 37). Apparently, the concerned public could take comfort in knowing that they had purchased a piece of liberty with their tax money.

Related to this issue of defense spending was the problem of Lebanon. Before Reagan's 1984 State of the Union address, 58% of the respondents to a Washington Post/ABC poll favored withdrawal of American marines from the Lebanon quagmire.³⁴ In light of that malaise, Ronald Reagan faced an audience troubled by the Lebanese question. In response to that confusion, the President offered the public an optimistic future despite lacking "a shred of evidence."³⁵ He told his listeners that "we are making progress ... for a free, independent, and sovereign Lebanon" (1984, 64). He then defined the situation in terms of American pride by proclaiming "We must not be driven from our objectives in Lebanon by state-sponsored terrorism" (1984, 64). Finally,

Reagan enthymematically compared Lebanon to Grenada with the introduction of heroic Sergeant Trujillo (1984, 73). Reagan hoped the audience would take comfort in the heroism of the servicemen in the Grenada rescue mission and would apply that same value of freedom to the situation in Lebanon. Reflecting on this rhetorical strategy, one writer concluded that Reagan "knows how to make lemonade out of his own lemons."³⁶ By appealing to the shared values of independence and American heroism, Reagan comforted his audience with respect to the Lebanon crisis. In terms of Condit's define/understand epideictic pair, Reagan defined progress in Lebanon as a function of fulfilling shared American values -- not as a function of dead American soldiers (which were not mentioned). In doing so, Reagan avoided controversial policy arguments in the hope that the audience would unite around these shared values.

Perhaps Reagan's audience was most troubled about the future and the state of the union after the Space Shuttle disaster "sent a shudder" across the nation and forced Reagan to postpone temporarily the 1986 State of the Union address.³⁷ In dealing with this audience discomfort, Reagan began his speech with a tribute which sounded almost eulogistic: "We pause together to mourn and honor the valor of our seven Challenger heroes. And I hope that we are now ready to do what they would want us to do -- go forward America, and reach for the stars. We will never forget those brave seven, but we shall go forward" (1986, 1). Drawing upon the shared value of courage shown by these astronauts, Reagan reassured the nation that the program would

continue: "Yes, this nation remains fully committed to America's space program. We are going forward with our shuttle flights" (1986, 38). By explaining the situation as he honored America's heroes, Reagan comforted a highly disillusioned audience.

Perhaps the biggest blow to the Reagan presidency was the involvement of the Administration in selling arms to Iran and diverting the funds to the rebels in Nicaragua. Before the State of the Union speech in 1987, the New York Times characterized the public as "deeply skeptical", "doubtful", "less optimistic", and "less trusting of the Government and of the President", largely as the result of public concern over the scandal.³⁸ Reagan initially handled his rhetorical problem by admitting to taking "a risk with regard to our action in Iran" (1987, 14). But he assured the audience that he would deal with the scandal: "We will get to the bottom of this and I will take whatever action is called for" (1987, 15). Of course, Reagan's focus on the epideictic was ideally suited for this situation. A deliberative orientation would have forced Reagan to give potentially damaging concrete explanations for failure in Iran. By sticking with epideictic rhetoric, the president avoided specificity that may have been incriminating. In this way, Reagan's promise for vague "action" tried to reassure the disillusioned audience without indicting his Administration.

In addition, Reagan essentially attempted to use the ends to justify the means by reminding the audience that "the goals were worthy" and that "it was not wrong to try to secure freedom for our citizens held in barbaric captivity" (1987, 15). In this

way, the Administration's failure in Iran was justified by Reagan in terms of the audience's value of liberty: "Let it never be said of this generation of Americans that we became so obsessed with failure that we refused to take risks that could further the cause of peace and freedom in the world" (1987, 16). By using underlying values which are common to all, Reagan attempted to dispel audience discomfort and mistrust about the damaging issue. Through epideictic rhetoric, Reagan hoped the audience would feel less threatened by the scandal knowing that the Administration was handling it and that America was still furthering "causes of peace and freedom."

Finally, Condit's define/understand functional pair locates Reagan's epideictic rhetoric in terms of the President's attempts to inject optimism into his audience. By showering the public with confidence and positive statements, Reagan comforted his audience and aided any listener who may have been in doubt about the nation's future. The 1982 State of the Union address's "amiable optimism"³⁹ in the midst of economic recession may have been one reason why a writer compared Reagan to Voltaire's Pangloss in Candide, who responded "All is well" and "This is the best of all worlds" to a series of calamities.⁴⁰ Reagan's "comforting tone"⁴¹ during his 1983 address was reflected in his declarations of an "America on the mend" (1983, 4 and 1983, 90) and of a citizenry with "good reason to be hopeful" (1983, 87). Despite the recession, the audience "would never know it from a Reagan performance,"⁴² essentially due to Reagan's epideictic gloss.

Perhaps the most optimistic of the six speeches was the 1984 address. Reagan began it with an epideictic exhortation of hope: "There is renewed energy and optimism in the land. America is back - standing tall, looking to the 80's with courage, confidence, and hope" (1984, 2). Reagan assured the audience that the nation was "confronting its problems" and that "hope is alive" (1984, 7). After proclaiming "one of the best recoveries in decades" (1984, 9) Reagan mocked his critics: "Send away the hand-wringers and doubting Thomases. Hope is reborn" (1984, 9). Then, in an eloquent instillation of comfort about the future, Reagan tried to banish all audience worry with this powerful vision:

I've never felt more strongly that America's best days ... lie ahead. We are a powerful force for good. With faith and courage, we can perform great deeds and take freedom's next step. And we will. We will carry on the traditions of a good and worthy people who have brought light where there was darkness, warmth where there was cold, medicine where there was disease, food where there was hunger, and peace where there was only bloodshed. (1984, 80)

In 1985, Reagan's State of the Union speech was designed to be "an uplift of the American spirit" in order to "make people feel as they want to -- that they are enlisted in an enterprise larger than themselves."⁴³ Reagan largely achieved this goal with "bright visions of the future"⁴⁴ epitomized by his proclamation that "There are no constraints on the human mind, no walls around the human spirit ..." (1985, 15). Reagan's positive outlook for the future was also captured well in his 1986 State of the Union speech, which included the optimistic reference to Back to the Future: "Where we're going, we don't need roads"

(1986, 36). Continuing on that path, Reagan assured the audience that "America can win the race to the future - and we shall" (1986, 48). Finally, Reagan concluded his speech in 1986 with typical epideictic eloquence: "In this land of dreams fulfilled where greater dreams may be imagined, nothing is impossible, no victory is beyond our reach, no glory will ever be too great" (1986, 54).

Not even the Iran-Contra Affair could shake Reagan's positive outlook. He again told the audience listening to the 1987 address that "America isn't finished, her best days have just begun" (1987, 83). He also stressed confidence in an America "with no limit to our reaches, no boundaries to what we can do, no endpoint to our hopes" (1987, 66). Reagan's "usual ebullient optimism"⁴⁵ climaxed at the conclusion of the address when Reagan invoked the spirit of Benjamin Franklin by agreeing with him that America's sun is rising, not setting (1987, 82).

Clearly, then, in terms of Condit's first functional pair, Reagan's State of the Union addresses were epideictic successes. Troubling issues were redefined in terms of the audience's key values and beliefs, thereby comforting worried listeners. In remaining positive and optimistic with rhetoric typical of epideictic grandeur, Reagan assured his audience of a promising future. All of this strategically enabled Ronald Reagan to soothe his audience with the comforting ointment of his rhetoric.

B. Share/Shape Functions

Condit's second functional pair is perhaps the best way to locate the epideictic success of Reagan's State of the Union addresses. Ronald Reagan masterfully reformulated America's shared heritage, values, and beliefs in all of his yearly assessments. In doing so, he also avoided the "anathema of partial interests" referred to by Condit by stressing bipartisanship and unity. Robert Dallek noted in The Politics of Symbolism that Reagan's "presidency has been a celebration of old values. Autonomy, self-help, free enterprise, individualism, liberty, hard work, production, morality, religion, and patriotism are ... the identifying symbols of Reagan's Administration"⁴⁶ That sentiment was evidenced well by Reagan's State of the Union messages.

Initially, Ronald Reagan beautifully reaffirmed the nation's belief that America is the best country in the world. In 1982 Reagan invoked his Inaugural promise of American greatness: "We as Americans have the capacity now, as we've had it in the past, to do whatever needs to be done to preserve this last and greatest bastion of freedom" (1982, 28). In 1983 Reagan called America the "world's technological leader" (1983, 51). In that spirit, Reagan later said that America has "the first flowering of the man-made miracles of high technology, a field pioneered and still led by our country" (1983, 62). Reagan's "America is back" (1984, 2) theme in 1984 was exemplified in his praising of America's "sunrise industries of high-tech" (1984, 10). In giving a "tribute to American teamwork and excellence" (1984,

37), Reagan explained how space is one field where America "effectively demonstrates (its) technological leadership and ability to make life better on earth" (1984, 36). Finally, as he prompted Americans toward greatness, Reagan asked the rhetorical question "How can we do less? We are Americans" (1984, 78).

In the 1985 State of the Union, Reagan observed that other nations recognize America's greatness by noting that Europeans refer to our economy as "'the American Miracle'" (1985, 16). The following year the President rejuvenated the "America is back" theme by noting "Tonight, we look out on a rising America -- firm of heart, united in spirit, powerful in pride and patriotism. America is on the move" (1986, 3). He also complemented the American people for their greatness in contributing to the nation's renewal (1986, 6-7). In addition, he called the economy in America "the model to which the world once again turns" (1986, 8). Reagan's affirmation of America's leadership was also evidenced by his 1986 proclamation that America can "out-produce, out-compete, and out-sell anybody, anywhere in the world" (1986, 27). Finally, in 1987 Reagan celebrated "the core of America's greatness" as "being our best" (1987, 63) and as achieving "a level of excellence unsurpassed in history" (1987, 52). Reagan's ability to tribute America's greatness in his State of the Union speeches was echoed well by one author after listening to the 1984 address: "This President never forgets the football fan desire of so many Americans to be 'No. 1'"⁴⁷ By fulfilling that desire with epideictic espousals, Reagan incited love for the country.

In conjunction with Reagan's narratives regarding America's greatness, the President also hailed the prosperity and wealth of our nation as a common value of the society. In the 1982 State of the Union Reagan proclaimed "prosperity for our nation" as one of "the oldest hopes of our republic" (1982, 6). In asking the citizens to meet that goal, Reagan urged: "seize these new opportunities to produce, to save, to invest, and together we'll make this economy a mighty engine of freedom, hope, and prosperity again" (1982, 41). As mentioned earlier, Reagan credited the American people for the growing prosperity and for creating an America "on the mend". By stating that the people contributed to the value of prosperity, Reagan unified his audience which could then feel involved in a "larger enterprise". President Reagan's "evangelical evocation of progress"⁴⁸ in his 1984 State of the Union address largely took the form of descriptions of an economically sound America. In the following year, Reagan praised the youth and strength of the American economy (1985, 20) after he incited a "Second American Revolution" (1985, 14) which he claimed would carry "us to new heights of progress by pushing back frontiers of knowledge and space" (1985, 14). Essentially, Reagan's focus on America's leadership and economic prosperity reminded the audience that they live in a great nation with a promising future. In that regard, he successfully celebrated the American value of living well.

Reagan also eloquently rehearsed the American values of peace and freedom in his State of the Union addresses. In 1982 Reagan quoted historic leaders on the subject of freedom: Washington ("'preservation of the sacred fire of liberty'"), Eisenhower ("peace was purchased only at the price of strength"), and Kennedy ("the burden and glory that is freedom") (1982, 3-4). In addition, he urged "all peace-loving peoples to join together ... to speak and pray for freedom" (1982, 85). Reagan's recitation of these American values in the 1983 address thoroughly re-established the notion of liberty in the United States:

America's leadership role in the world came to us because of our own strength and because of the values which guide us as a society: free elections, a free press, freedom of religious choice, free trade unions, and above all, freedom for the individual and rejection of the arbitrary power of the State. These values are the bed-rock of our strength. (1983, 65)

In 1984, Reagan reminded the audience that America is a nation that "champions peace that enshrines liberty, democratic rights, and dignity for every individual" (1984, 15). He also strategically addressed the Soviet people at the end of the 1984 speech, which, in reality, was an epideictic affirmation of America's commitment to peace directed at the American, not Soviet, audience:

Americans are people of peace. If your government wants peace there will be peace. We can come together in faith and friendship to build a safer and far better world for our children and our children's children. And the whole world will rejoice. That is my message to you. (1984, 70)

By addressing the people of Russia, Reagan assured the American audience that he was committed to the shared value of world peace. Finally, in both 1984 and 1985, Reagan stated that America was "safer, stronger, and more secure ... than ever before" (1984, 66 and 1985, 1). The audience could take comfort in knowing that America remained committed to the related goals of peace and freedom and could rejoice at our nation's success in meeting those goals. Since Reagan effectively echoed these American values in his State of the Union addresses, he successfully meets Condit's second functional pair.

Reagan's rehearsals of the above values were intended to instill patriotism in his audience. Hopefully, the nation would be proud to be part of a country that was a world leader, more prosperous than ever before, full of freedom, and at peace with the world. In addition, Reagan constantly reminded his audience that respect had been restored to a great national symbol -- the military uniform -- by arguing that "our country's uniform is being worn once again with pride" (1982, 26; 1983, 69; 1984, 14; and 1987, 13). Reagan also praised the American people in recognition of how wonderful it is to live in our country. For example, in 1982 he applauded the American "volunteer spirit" (1982, 53), in 1983 the President commended the citizens for being "the most generous people on Earth" (1983, 83), and in 1987 he affirmed that Americans can meet their "quest for excellence" by expending "American spirit and just plain American grit" (1987, 53). Evidently, Reagan knew the audience would take pride in being part of the wonderful breed known as Americans: "You

know they're Americans because their spirit is as big as the universe, and their hearts are bigger than their spirits" (1987, 79). By defining the American in this way, Reagan made it difficult not to be proud of our heritage and values. As one author put it, the "abundant patriotic pageantry"⁴⁹ in Reagan's State of the Union messages "reinforces the almost reflexive impulse to love America and its leader."⁵⁰ In other words, Reagan's use of the epideictic successfully created a powerful enthymeme -- since you are a citizen of America and I am America's leader, you must love both it and me. By appealing to patriotism, which necessarily includes respect and admiration for the president, Reagan essentially enhanced his credibility as a rhetor. This positive effect would have been difficult to accomplish with deliberative rhetoric. It seems that in all of his annual messages, Reagan tapped that "primordial chord"⁵¹ known as patriotism and excited the audience with epideictic rhetoric celebrating who we are and how we got that way.

Reagan often told moving success stories of American heroes whose heroism makes us proud to live in the United States. By introducing tremendously patriotic and hard-working Americans who have beaten the odds, Reagan breathed new life into the American spirit. As he dramatically pointed out these genuine heroes in celebration of their accomplishments, he also cast a "mythic, even religious aura over them"⁵² which ceremonized the occasion even more. In 1982 the chosen hero was Lenny Skutnik (1982, 99) whose brave rescue of a woman from the icy Potomac River, televised all over the nation, was still vivid in the minds of

the audience. (Reagan also graced the government he heads by pointing out that Skutnik was one of his employees.) In 1984 the President hailed the enterprises of Barbara Proctor "who rose from a ghetto shack to build a multi-million dollar advertising agency" (1984, 10) and Carlos Perez, "a Cuban refugee who turned twenty-seven dollars and a dream into a successful importing business" (1984, 10).

Reagan's introduction of Sergeant Trujillo was perhaps the best example of his epideictic excellence in celebrating "what it means to be Americans" (1984, 71). Describing dramatically the bravery of Trujillo in saving his "wounded friends" despite an "imminent explosion" and "enemy fire" (1984, 72), Reagan concluded: "You not only saved innocent lives, you set a nation free. You inspire us as a force for freedom, not tyranny; for democracy, not despotism; and yes, for peace, not conquest -- God bless you" (1984, 73). Reagan's commendations of Father Ritter (director of Covenant House in New York) and Charles Carson (a crippled doctor who works 80 hours a week without pay) rendered his following rhetorical question answerable in only one way: "How can we not believe in the goodness and greatness of America" (1984, 75-77)? In 1985 the heroes were Clara Hale (a 79-year-old Harlem woman helping the children of drug addicts) and Jean Nguyen (a Vietnamese refugee who is a cadet at West Point).⁵³ Finally, in 1986, Reagan heroecized four children in order to inspire the audience and to exemplify the American dream as "a song of hope that rings through the night winter air" (1986, 49). In every case, Reagan's heroes embodied the common values

indicative of America's greatness. By mentioning them, Reagan celebrated the shared heritage of his listeners and ignited new hopes for the fulfillment of dreams. This epideictic strategy exemplifies well the shape/share function of Condit's model.

Reagan also wove the common desire of all Americans to reach their dreams into his State of the Union messages. By recreating the value of the American dream in his speeches, Reagan uplifted his audience. Of course, his "American heroes" evidenced well his claim that all dreams are reachable. In addition to his introductions of specific heroes, Reagan also mentioned the whole of "unsung heroes" (1982, 100) and "extra-ordinary 'ordinary' Americans" (1983, 91) in support of his assertion that "there is nothing we Americans cannot achieve as free men and women" (1983, 89).

Reagan often asked Americans to work for their dreams. In 1984, Reagan defined America as a country "too great for small dreams" (1984, 6) before he urged Americans to "follow our dreams to distant stars" (1984, 38). In the 1985 address, the President summoned the audience to follow "the giants of our history ... forward to the dreams their vision foresaw" (1985, 14). In the following year's speech, Reagan eloquently analogized dreaming to mountain-climbing when he stressed that "we cannot stop at the foothills when Everest beckons. It is time for America to be all that we can be" (1986, 9). In addition to asking Americans to dream, Reagan also assured them of success. The address given in 1985 told the audience that Reagan's visions are "dreams we can make come true" (1985, 80) and the 1986 State of the Union

contained the admonition "let no one say that this nation cannot reach the destiny of our dreams" (1986, 48). All in all, the President often utilized the tendency of all Americans to dream about success to his rhetorical advantage. In doing so, he fulfilled the crucial epideictic function of invigorating tired values and beliefs in celebration of America's greatness.

Reagan often appealed to the audience's belief that the government should be fair to all citizens. In addition to offering verbal support to a vast array of special interest groups, Reagan also voiced his commitment to a tax system based on fairness. In 1982 Reagan assured his listeners that he would not "balance the budget on the backs of the American taxpayers" (1982, 41). In the following year Reagan offered to "simplify the tax code and make it fair for all Americans" (1983, 42). Once again, in 1984, the President proclaimed "simple fairness dictates that Government must not raise taxes on those struggling to pay their bills" (1984, 25). In this way, Reagan's support of a somewhat deliberative measure (no new taxes) became support of an American value.

Similar support for the poor and needy was offered by Reagan in order to enhance his image of fairness. In 1984 Reagan asked "Can we love America and not reach out to tell them: You are not forgotten ..." (1984, 12)? In 1985 and 1986 Reagan repeated his promise of remembrance: "There must be no forgotten Americans" (1985, 28) and "we will never abandon those who, through no fault of their own, must have our help" (1986, 49). Reagan's rhetorical assurances tried to comfort his audience unsure of

his commitment to the value of fairness. Time magazine noted that Reagan's State of the Union address in 1983 "offered compassion ... to those suffering from the recession" and that "it had soothing words for women, blacks, the elderly and others who have felt slighted by the Administration."⁵⁴ Reagan's invocation of this value gave him a better image in the public's eye. Following the 1986 address, one writer observed that Reagan's "concern for all America shines through his rhetoric and through him."⁵⁵ It also exemplified the President's ability to celebrate a shared American value.

One of the President's most common appeals is to the value of family. His State of the Union addresses were not exceptions to his rhetorical support of that value. In the 1984 State of the Union, Reagan proclaimed that "Families stand at the center of our society" (1984, 47). The next address contained Reagan's hope "For an America of wisdom that honors the family; knowing that as the family goes, so goes our civilization" (1985, 7). Finally, in 1986, Reagan mentioned the value of family nineteen times⁵⁶ in proclaiming family and community as "the co-stars of this Great American comeback" (1986, 7). Clearly, Reagan's emphasis on the family is a good example of his ability to renew common values.

Ronald Reagan's invocation of God and religion is also a characteristic of his rhetorical style. One writer observed that "God never strays very far from Reagan's speeches."⁵⁷ Reagan's "God bless you's" and "God bless America's" were common additions to his State of the Union speeches. He also referred to God in a

variety of other contexts within his annual reports. In 1982, Reagan celebrated America as a nation governed by "the rule of law under God" (1982, 94). In 1984 he alluded to American's "God-given talents" (1984, 12). In the same address, Reagan offered a wonderful epideictic rehearsal of America's spiritual needs (following the largely deliberative support of school prayer legislation):

America was founded by people who believed God was their rock of safety. He is ours. I recognize that we must be cautious in claiming that God is on our side. But I think it's all right to keep asking if we are on His side. (1984, 51)

In the State of the Union address given in 1985, the President praised the uplift in American spirit and togetherness evidenced by the increase in attendance at places of worship (1985, 52). Finally, Reagan's references to "God's children" (1985, 71 and 1986, 44) climaxed with his introduction of the gospel music prodigy Tyrone Ford who has "God as his composer" (1986, 51). Reagan's celebration of God and American spirituality, especially in conjunction with other American values, is additional documentation of Reagan's epideictic success.

Reagan's weaving of the above traditional values greatly enhanced his ability to unify his audience. In addition, the President focused on bipartisanship and togetherness in all of his State of the Union messages. In doing so, he avoided the "anathema" of divisiveness of which Condit wrote. Reagan's emphasis on unity locates his rhetoric squarely within the realm of the epideictic. In 1982, as Reagan evidenced the signs of American success, the President began seven consecutive

paragraphs with "Together, we ..." (1982, 21-27). Reagan also praised "bipartisan commissions" often: on Clean Air (1982, 56), on excellence in education (1984, 48), on protecting peace (1984, 63), and on Central America (1984, 63). Reagan's "tone of commitment to bipartisanship"⁵⁸ in his 1983 State of the Union address was reflected well by his introductory call for unity: "I would like to talk with you this evening about what we can do together -- not as Republicans or Democrats, but as Americans -- to make tomorrow's America happy ..." (1983, 2). This de-emphasis of political affiliation was also voiced in 1984: "When it comes to keeping America strong, free, and at peace, there should be no Republicans or Democrats, just patriotic Americans" (1984, 61).

A key Reagan strategy for unifying America was acknowledging members of the immediate audience by addressing them directly. For example, in 1983, Reagan "saluted" the members of the commission on social security (as well as Senate Majority Leader Howard Baker and Speaker Tip O'Neill) "for a job well done" in "bipartisan spirit" (1983, 13-14). The following year, Reagan promised to work with Baker and O'Neill on deficit reduction (1984, 29). In 1986, Reagan eloquently displayed his ability to unify the audience with a tribute to the retiring Speaker of the House:

Mr. Speaker, before I begin my prepared remarks, may I point out that tonight marks the 10th and last State of the Union Message that you've presided over. On behalf of the American people, I want to salute you for your service to Congress and country. Here's to you, Tip. (1986, 2)

Continuing in that spirit, Reagan told the Speaker shortly after the tribute that he desired to work together to repair the budget system: "Before we leave the city, let's you and I work together to fix it" (1986, 13). In 1987, Reagan appeased the members of the 100th Congress by invoking "special executive powers to declare that each of you must never be titled less than Honorable with a capital 'H'" (1987, 5). Shortly thereafter, Reagan renewed his pledge to work with the Speaker of the House (Jim Wright) and the Senate Majority Leader (Robert Byrd) after extending "warm congratulations" to the former (1987, 7-8). Strategically, Reagan's pledges, comments, and tributes to members of the immediate audience reinforced the country's belief that the government can work together to get things done. Through respect and rapport, Reagan convinced the American people that the government was still a harmonious entity.

Reagan also addressed the nation in the spirit of unity in his State of the Union messages. In 1983, Reagan warned "men and women of both parties and every political shade" against the "short-term temptations of partisan politics" (1983, 18). In the same speech, Reagan's rhetoric summoning Americans to "walk this path together" (1983, 45) and to "work together to make America better" (1983, 94) prompted this response from a New York Times editorialist: "The State of the Union, to judge by the President's words, is togetherness. He talked about bipartisanship and working together a dozen times in his report to Congress."⁵⁹ Reagan's "bipartisan tenor"⁶⁰ of his 1984 State of the Union was also directed at the American people. In the

opening remarks he commented: "Americans were ready to make a new beginning, and together we have done it" (1984, 7). Twice Reagan employed the "Together, we can ..." strategy mentioned above in order to rally support for broad goals (1984, 17 and 1984, 62). In the introductory remarks of the State of the Union message in 1985, Reagan praised the American people for bringing forth "a nation renewed" thanks to their "united effort" (1985, 1). In 1986, Reagan's "path" (1983, 45) became a "last mile" that Americans had to walk together (1986, 25). Finally, in 1987, Reagan's conclusion framed by "We the people" (1987, 71-80) celebrated eloquently the tradition of a nation united under 200 years of Constitutional freedom and self-government. By stressing the bipartisan efforts of an America working together, Reagan successfully unified his audience and recreated the glorified image of Americans toiling arm in arm for the common good. In doing so, Reagan utilized largely epideictic rhetoric as defined by Condit's shape/share functional pair. In avoiding the divisiveness of controversial special interests, Reagan once again uplifted the American spirit.

(Sometimes an event beyond the rhetor's control serves to unify an audience. A good example occurred in 1985 when the immediate audience sang "Happy Birthday" to President Reagan before he began his State of the Union address, which was scheduled on his 74th birthday. Although the display was somewhat contrived, the New York Times observed that nothing "could be more amiably bipartisan than singing 'Happy Birthday' to the President of the United States.")⁶¹

Reagan's ability to incorporate and to rehearse key values of Americans was one of the great successes of his State of the Union messages. In rededicating these values, Reagan successfully utilized the epideictic rhetoric involved in Condit's shape/share functional pair. A few eloquent passages from his addresses displayed that incorporation and rehearsal quite well. In 1984, for example, Reagan said:

The heart of America is strong, good, and true. The cynics were wrong -- America never was a sick society. We're seeing rededication to bedrock values of faith, family, work, neighborhood, peace, and freedom - values that help bring us together as one people, from the youngest child to the most senior citizen. (1984, 13)

Later in that speech, Reagan asked the nation to strengthen "our community of shared values For us, faith, family, work, neighborhood, freedom and peace are not just words. They are expressions of what America means, definitions of what makes us good and loving people" (1984, 46). The following year, Reagan celebrated a nation renewed:

Tonight, America is stronger because of the values we hold dear. We believe faith and freedom must be our guiding stars, for they show us truth, make us brave, give us hope, and leave us wiser than ever. Our progress began ... in the hearts of our families, communities, work places, and voluntary groups, which, together, are unleashing the invincible spirit of one great nation under God. (1985, 3)

In each of these passages, Reagan's embodiment and espousal of our nation's shared heritage is clear. Reagan becomes the real American. Perhaps this is one explanation of an author's conclusion that criticizing Reagan is like criticizing Yellowstone Park.⁶² At any rate, Reagan masters the second

functional pair of epideictic rhetoric. Following the 1984 State of the Union address, Elizabeth Drew concluded:

Reagan's sense of theatre is unmatched in politics, his use of language unique, and his capacity for arrogating unto himself the symbols and values America holds dear -- flag, family, God, patriotism, national strength -- awesome. He is the master weaver of the national myths.⁶³

It is clear Reagan's State of the Union messages were epideictic successes in this regard.

C. Display/Entertainment Functions

The final pair in Condit's model of epideictic rhetoric focuses on the nature of the speaker as a showman who entertains an audience of spectators during an epideictic speech. In this respect, Ronald Reagan's excellence as an epideictic rhetor is clear. Few could doubt that many of the stirring passages quoted above displayed Reagan's keen ability to perform on the political stage. Indeed, Reagan excited the national audience as he recited their shared values and ceremonized an America of greatness. Many authors have noted that Reagan's flawless ability to read from the Teleprompters with spontaneity and grace contributed to his ability to entertain.⁶⁴ After every State of the Union speech, the popular press buzzed with the news of Reagan's success from a display standpoint. Their viewpoints will be used to support Reagan's success as an entertainer.

After the 1982 State of the Union address, Time magazine noted that Reagan's "41-minute television performance ... was vintage Reagan, as flawlessly paced and as forcefully persuasive as any of his campaign speeches"⁶⁵ before praising his "showman's instinct."⁶⁶ Following the 1983 message, Reagan's

"actor's instinct" was hailed as the reason why he "reads a State of the Union message better than any President since Franklin Roosevelt."⁶⁷ The following year, an editorialist for the New York Times noted Reagan's glowing showmanship throughout the annual message: "To watch him describe the State of the Union was to see brilliance on the political stage. Raising geniality to an art form, he gathered and he lucked and he shone...."⁶⁸ In 1985 the President's "infectious buoyancy ... gave a lift to his performance before the television cameras"⁶⁹ as his "classic bit of political theatre"⁷⁰ was hailed by one writer impressed by Reagan's showmanship. Another magazine concluded that the speech "eclipsed his (Second) Inaugural Address" as he "wowed the national audience with bright visions of the future."⁷¹

In reality, Ronald Reagan's "wowing" of the television audience was quite deliberate, often to the exclusion of the real audience -- Congress. Many authors have observed that Reagan directed most of his addresses to the secondary audience of spectators rather than to his primary Congressional audience of legislators. In other words, he addressed his comments to those least powerful to modify the problems. In this way, the Constitutional mandate to report and to recommend became Reagan's personal goal to display his eloquence in speech and to entertain the home viewers. After the 1985 address, Newsweek reported that Reagan turned his speech "into a kind of second Inaugural Address directed toward the American people rather than to Congress and the rest of 'inside-the-beltway' Washington."⁷² Echoing that sentiment, Elizabeth Drew also noted that those in the House

Chamber were "mere props" for Reagan's performance before the television cameras.⁷³ When seen in this light, Reagan's State of the Union messages become less of policy statements to Congress and more of exercises in telling the people what they desire to hear. In other words, he sacrificed Constitutional obligation in order to entertain. James Reston of the New York Times supported this analysis when he asked rhetorically: "In this sense, he has 'united' the people behind him, but has he done so by telling the people the true 'State of the Union,' or by telling them what they wanted to hear?"⁷⁴

Reagan, in giving Americans an ideal and lofty picture of current and future conditions intermixed with shared dreams and values, simultaneously avoided a clear and logical "report" as well as effective and expedient "recommendations". Reagan guided the nation with State of the Union performances rather than with annual political policy-making. And there is every reason to believe that the audience was entertained. As one writer who said Reagan "makes Johnny Carson sound like an amateur" observed after the 1984 State of the Union performance: "And the people seem to love it. It's the best show on television."⁷⁵ In this way, then, Reagan's rhetoric was largely successful from the epideictic standpoint located by Condit's display/entertainment functional pair.

Indeed, Reagan's State of the Union addresses from 1982 to 1987 were clear epideictic successes with respect to each part of Condit's model for this genre. The speeches defined major problems in terms of the audience's beliefs and values in order

to provide a comforting understanding, shaped the shared heritage of the audience in order to uplift the American spirit in eloquent unification, and displayed Reagan's unique ability to entertain an audience of spectators. From a deliberative standpoint, however, Reagan's annual speeches largely failed. I have alluded to Reagan's inadequacies in that regard in the above analysis. That neglect becomes much clearer when one analyzes exactly what Reagan avoided in his ceremonies called "State of the Union".

III. Deliberative Failures

Reagan's State of the Union messages were largely unsuccessful in terms of that genre's deliberative nature described in Chapter One. Granted, all of the President's annual messages contained policy suggestions and reviews which any rhetorician would classify as deliberative rhetoric. In this sense, the President at least minimally met the Constitutional requirements to report and to recommend to Congress. On the whole, however, these policy statements and specific directives were not central to any of Reagan's State of the Union addresses. Reagan's failure in terms of deliberative rhetoric can easily be supported from a textual analysis like the one given in the preceding chapter. Given limits of time and space, however, this analysis is designed to be illustrative rather than exhaustive.

In 1982, Reagan needed to give deliberative specificity with regard to the troubled economy. In the State of the Union speech, Reagan had the opportunity to give executive direction in matters of specific economic policy. Reagan did "report" on the state of the economy. After exposing a litany of economic statistics and appraisals, the president revealed his strategy in doing so: "Our current problems ... are the inheritance of decades of tax and tax, spend and spend" (1982, 32). In this way, Reagan reported the problems of the nation's economy in order to deny his responsibility for them. Of course, Reagan's

"recommendations" in 1982 were not policies at all. In actuality, they were decisions not to do what had been done before -- tax and spend. Moreover, these decisions were phrased in general terms of position and not policy. Thus, Reagan avoided the need for deliberative rhetoric that would have arisen if the president chose to give specific tax and spending reduction policies. In its place, Reagan used epideictic rhetoric to gain popular support for his positions of lower taxes and budget frugality: reassurances to the poor and needy that they will not be forgotten (1982, 64), claims of fairness to American taxpayers (1982, 41), and philosophical support for free enterprise (1982, 49). In this way, Reagan successfully espoused an economic position and supported it with epideictic rhetoric without giving any deliberative recommendations of policy. Reagan's 1982 State of the Union address, despite the comforting words and hopeful visions, offered "no new initiatives to conquer the economic crisis."⁷⁶ Even the Republican leader Robert Michel argued that the speech "did not directly address the nation's economic plight."⁷⁷

Reagan's deliberative failures in 1982 can be seen in other areas of the speech. Many times the president voiced rhetorical support without corresponding policy elaboration. For example, Reagan claimed that his Administration would have "concern for equal rights for women" (1982, 53) without giving deliberative details. Reagan also proclaimed to "seek transformation of our legal system" (1982, 55) without outlining the specifics of that transformation. Reagan's avoidance of the deliberative also

continued into the discussion of foreign policy. Rather than giving specific policies in the foreign realm, Reagan employed epideictic rhetoric intended to appeal to American values of strength and decisiveness. Instead of explaining new endeavors in relation to Cuba and Libya, Reagan said that "we will act with firmness" (1982, 59). With respect to problems in Poland, the president assured the audience that "further measures will follow" (1982, 62). In these cases and others, Reagan avoided the deliberative specifics which may have invited criticism.

The avoidances continued in the 1983 State of the Union Address. Once again, Reagan hedged on recommending any new foreign policy programs. Instead, he espoused that the United States would bond in similar values with our allies (1983, 65-66) and would take "the initiative to make peace" (1983, 70) with our adversaries. In both cases, Reagan refused to outline policy specifics with deliberative rhetoric.

The deliberative failure of Reagan in the 1983 address continued into his discussion of domestic affairs. Reagan declared "all-out war on big-time organized crime and drug racketeers" (1983, 56) but, unlike President Johnson with poverty, refused to elaborate on the war metaphor with policy specifics. In the same paragraph, Reagan announced "it is high time we make our cities safe again" (1983, 56) but the appeal for safety was not accompanied by any policy recommendations. Perhaps Reagan's largest deliberative failure in 1983 involved his handling of the deficit crisis. Rather than giving direct and specific policies for dealing with the deficits, the

president chose to use vague rhetoric which merely showed his support for lower deficits. Reagan told the audience that he would "hold the line on real spending" (1983, 37); "ask the Congress to adopt specific measures to control the growth of the so-called 'uncontrollable' spending programs" (1983, 39); and "propose a stand-by tax" in case the other "policies" failed to work (1983, 41). These vague positions allowed the president to appear supportive of deficit reduction without generating the controversy which would accompany specific spending cuts and tax increases. In fact, the only specific cut Reagan proposed in the address was a token \$55 billion reduction over five years in the already inflated defense budget. Reagan's strategic avoidance of deliberative specifics may have backfired. As one author concluded: "Reagan's refusal to deal firmly with the deficit crisis was the main reason his speech received so little praise."⁷⁸

When the deficit problem continued into 1983, Reagan once again failed to deal with it on a policy level in his State of the Union Address. Reagan's only "deliberative proposals" were to recommend that Congress review the suggestions of the Grace Commission (1984, 20) and to offer to work on a bipartisan effort to make a "down payment" on the deficit (1984, 27). In reality, Reagan used the deficit crisis to initiate epideictic rhetoric regarding defense spending and taxation. The president argued that further defense cuts would be dangerous because "we dare not shirk our responsibility to keep America free, secure, and at peace" (1984, 22). He also dismissed tax increases because "simple fairness dictates Government must not raise taxes on

families struggling to pay their bills" (1984, 25). After explaining what he would not do, and invoking the American values of peace and fairness, Reagan refused to explain what he would do to confront the crisis. In other words, he avoided shining the light on those that were soon to be under the knife. In "waiving the opportunity" to cite "specific examples"⁷⁹ needed to reduce the deficit, Reagan merely "shook his rhetoric at it."⁸⁰ Once again, the deliberative requirement of the genre was slighted in favor of epideictic elements.

Reagan's deliberative failures in 1984 were evident in other areas of the speech. With respect to civil rights legislation, Reagan only touched the issue by asserting that there would be no more "barriers of bigotry or discrimination" (1984, 18). Sexual discrimination was similarly avoided -- Reagan gave only a glimmer of statistical hope but no specific policies (1984, 11). Lebanon was also avoided by Reagan in terms of deliberative specifics. Instead of offering new policies, Reagan merely said that he would "forward shortly legislative proposals" and would "be seeking support from our allies" (1984, 64). Finally, Reagan also failed to give new initiatives with respect to nuclear arms control. Instead, the president used the epideictic strategy of addressing the Soviet people to show the country's support for a "sane policy" in the nuclear age (1984, 67-70). The Nation also observed these avoidances of policy specifics in the 1984 State of the Union: "He never mentioned civil rights, he sloughed off sexual discrimination in one skewed statistic, he raced through Lebanon in one paragraph, and he disposed of the nuclear

nightmare with a personal appeal to the Soviet people."⁸¹ With regard to that last avoidance, Hedrick Smith of the New York Times agreed that Reagan's epideictic affirmation of peace to the audience came at the expense of offering "new proposals to break the stalemate (between Russia and the United States)."⁸² In this case and the others, Reagan's deliberative neglect in the 1984 State of the Union Address is clear.

Problems for Reagan at the policy level of rhetoric also surfaced the following year. The deliberative failure in the 1985 address was reflected in the sentiment of Marci MacDonald in MacLeans magazine: "He glossed over three of the gravest problems with which his administration was wrestling last week: the record \$222-billion budget deficit; his proposed \$51-billion in spending cuts for fiscal year 1986, which ran into bipartisan opposition on Capitol Hill; and the worst farm crisis to hit the United States since the Great Depression."⁸³ The "gloss" on the farm crisis was the clearest deliberative failure. Reagan recognized the farmer's plight and their need for an "orderly transition to a market-oriented farm economy," but his speech merely cited vague "fundamental reforms" without giving any policy specifics (1985, 39). Ms. MacDonald also concluded that "the speech yielded few indications of his second-term agenda."⁸⁴ That conclusion was especially valid with respect to budgetary policy. Reagan's concern for his popular image at the expense of giving the audience specific direction in dealing with the budget crisis was also voiced by Senator Mark Andrews: "The president has to come down out of the clouds. In the State

of the Union he enhanced his own standing, but he didn't address the meat of the issue -- and that's the federal deficit."⁸⁵ (In fact, the word "deficit" was mentioned only three times.) Dismay over Reagan's 1985 failure was evidenced by one author's conclusion that the President's "avoidance of unpleasant specifics" led to the abandonment of the Constitutional pattern for State of the Union addresses.⁸⁶

In the 1985 State of the Union Address, Reagan also voiced support of positions without giving policy details that may have generated controversy or criticism. Reagan announced that "it is time to liberate the spirit of enterprise in the most distressed areas of our country" (1985, 26) without citing the specific initiatives required to achieve that liberation. Reagan's assurance that his Administration would "meet its responsibility to help those in need" (1985, 27) was also not accompanied by policy details. Reagan also asserted that "it is time we restored domestic tranquility" (1985, 62) without citing specific recommendations. Finally, in the foreign policy area, the president's claim to "nourish and defend freedom and democracy" (1985, 72) was also silent at the policy level. In each of these instances, Reagan failed to give deliberative direction to Congress.

The 1986 State of the Union was also a deliberative failure. Once again, Reagan refused to define and recommend specific policies. The president gave rhetorical support for the ends of legislation without giving the specific means to achieve those ends. For example, Reagan explained that true tax reform

must be "pro-family, pro-jobs, pro-future, and pro-America" (1986, 26) without citing the exact nature of those needed reforms. Reagan vowed to oppose legislation that would restrict free trade (1986, 27) but did not describe the legislation in that area which he would support. In addition, Reagan once again recognized the plight of American farmers who had been subject to "unwise government policies" (1986, 28) but stopped short of initiating new "wise policies" to help them with their problems. Finally, the president vowed to "achieve democracy in Nicaragua" (1986, 45) without outlining specific deliberative action needed to achieve that goal.

Reagan's failure in 1986 from a deliberative perspective was echoed in the press. After the speech, the New York Times noted that the "unusually short speech offered few specific legislative proposals."⁸⁷ In that light, an author for The New Republic called "Reagan's evasions" on budgetary legislation a "cowardly approach of failing to cite specific cuts."⁸⁸ Concluded the author: "Instead of accepting his presidential obligation to face unpleasant truths ... Reagan sketched a dazzling scheme for two-hour plane rides to Tokyo."⁸⁹ Other authors were more lenient in citing Reagan's deliberative failures in the 1986 State of the Union speech. Noted one: it was "a bit too glib about the details."⁹⁰ Others, like William Safire, were more harsh:

If a President chooses to ignore the Constitutional requirement for a report of the State of the Union, and prefers instead to mobilize support for his philosophy, his speech should spell out the sacrifices he expects for the benefits he promises. That is his job, nobody else's, and it requires political courage. In his hodgepodge speech, President Reagan flinched.⁹¹

In 1987, Reagan had another opportunity to deliver a largely deliberative speech rather than his usual ceremonial invocations of America's values and beliefs. Dennis Thomas, a Presidential Assistant, composed a State of the Union speech that was essentially "a laundry list of legislative proposals."⁹² But in the end, Reagan chose a competing value draft written by Ken Khachigian because he felt "more comfortable with it."⁹³ The New York Times, however, attributed Reagan's choice to Nancy Reagan's preferences.⁹⁴ At any rate, the speech as delivered was the typical Reagan avoidance of deliberative specifics.

Once again, Reagan's deliberative failure in the annual report was seen in a variety of areas in which the president could have offered new policy initiatives. Reagan supported a "political solution" in Afghanistan (1987, 25) but did not outline specific steps which needed to be taken in order to achieve that solution. Reagan also alluded to a new welfare policy without giving specifics to the audience (1987, 49-50). Instead, he used the allusion to ensure the poor and elderly that whatever the policy would entail, it would not abandon their needs. The president's "quest for excellence" strategy also did not contain any policy specifics (1987, 53). Finally, Reagan once again invoked a "crusade against drugs" (1987, 58) without outlining the crusade's policy content. Reagan's failure in 1987 was also noticed by the Congressional audience and by the press.

Representative Jim Leach of Iowa commented that "the tenor was absolutely right, but the substance was lacking."⁹⁵ Another author noted that the 1987 performance "offered no plan for the future."⁹⁶ Finally, an article in Time concluded that the President's view of the State of the Union was backed up "mainly by exhortation rather than specific proposals."⁹⁷

The clear deduction from the above analysis is that Reagan either downplayed or ignored the deliberative nature of the State of the Union message as required by the Constitution. In ceremonizing the occasion, Reagan largely missed the reason for the ceremony -- to report on the State of the Union and to offer new, expedient measures of policy. In other words, his annual speeches failed to address the deliberative functions of the State of the Union speech envisioned by the Framers of our Constitution.

IV. Conclusions

Speeches of a genre "have conventional forms because they arise in situations with similar structures and elements and because rhetors respond in similar ways, having learned from precedent what is appropriate and what effects their actions are likely to have on other people."⁹⁸ In other words, speeches within a similar genre will tend to be alike because the rhetors giving those speeches are likely to have similar situational demands. However, some situations are more "demanding" from a rhetorical standpoint than other situations. These instances are more constraining to a rhetor in terms of what choices can be made in responding to rhetorical problems. An example of a highly constraining genre is the eulogy. A eulogizing rhetor must conform his or her rhetorical style to severe social demands and taboos. "Violations" of this genre are easily identified. Other genres are less constraining. In these situations, a rhetor has greater latitude in formulating strategies and styles to meet rhetorical problems. The State of the Union address exemplifies a genre with "lighter" situational demands. Presidents are not highly limited by the Constitution in their approach to the annual message. In addition, the functional duality mentioned in Chapter One illustrates the latitude of the State of the Union genre. It functions largely in the manner that the president desires it to function. Rhetoric is tailored to meet those presidential desires. Strategies are chosen to

conform with the intended function. The genre of the State of the Union address guides a president in making these choices, but it does not necessarily limit him. It is a genre of functional choice, but not one of functional constraint.

Ronald Reagan's decision to emphasize epideictic functions of the State of the Union address at the expense of deliberative functions is obvious when one considers the textual analysis presented in Chapter Two and Chapter Three. In light of this research, a hasty solution to the critical problem of discerning this genre's "dominant" function would be to conclude that the State of the Union has primarily an epideictic function which is met through epideictic rhetoric. However, I could easily have chosen a different president to illustrate the dominance of the deliberative function. For this reason, the proper solution to the critical problem is that the function of the State of the Union address is determined not by the genre, but by the rhetor. In other words, the function of the State of the Union message is not limited by constraint of genre.

Granted, this conclusion does not really solve the critical problem at all. Reagan's preference for epideictic rhetoric does not necessarily mean that the State of the Union address functions primarily as an epideictic speech. It also does not mean that Reagan is an aberration because the genre is supposed to function as an exclusively deliberative mode of discourse. What it does indicate is that the genre is loosely defined by precedent and situation in terms of function. A presidential rhetor must decide which function of the address to accentuate

based upon his nature as a rhetor. A president must assess his ability, talent, image, personality, and past successes and failures in order to determine which function of the address to emphasize. For this reason, the way in which a president handles the State of the Union address illuminates much about the president himself. In other words, the textual analysis of this thesis says more about Reagan as a rhetor than about the State of the Union as a genre.

Reagan's choice of epideictic rhetoric and neglect of deliberative rhetoric illustrates his nature as a rhetor. Initially, it points to the fact that Reagan likes to avoid specifics and details. The president's shunning of policy specificity indicates his preference for broad themes and general positions. Secondly, Reagan's dominant use of epideictic rhetoric demonstrates that he tends to see problems and issues in terms of values rather than in terms of new policies and initiatives. Reagan reduces everything to a value position -- whether its Lebanon, social spending, abortion, or education. For this reason, Reagan attempts to transcend specific problems by appealing to fundamental beliefs with epideictic rhetoric instead of attacking those problems with deliberative policies. His State of the Union messages illustrate these attempts well.

Reagan's emphasis of the epideictic also indicates his desire to avoid conflict at all costs. For this reason, Reagan always stops short of suggesting controversial policies which may alienate and offend certain groups. Reagan, above all, is a rhetor of unity and not of division. As a rhetor, Reagan would

rather ask Congress to "study" a problem with a "bipartisan commission" than stick out his neck with a bold solution that has a potential to offend. Reagan perceives his role as one of unification. His State of the Union messages support this claim. Perhaps this is why he refuses to set his agenda in the annual message. Specific policies are strategically left for a later written report to Congress. In the speech itself, policies are deliberately subordinated to his attempts to uplift, inspire, and unify the national audience. For this reason, Reagan's State of the Union Addresses are largely messages to the people rather than directions to Congress. To maintain that popular leadership, Reagan utilizes the power of epideictic speech and sacrifices the limits of the deliberative.

Of course, Reagan's functional choices in his State of the Union messages also illustrate his shortcomings as a policy leader. Reagan's neglect of policy recommendations evidences the fact that he is "intellectually lazy" and "uninformed" on a wide range of policy issues.⁹⁹ Reagan's avoidance of deliberative rhetoric illustrates the fact that the president is relatively incompetent to discuss most problems in policy terms. For Reagan, it does not matter that the words he uses are factual, accurate, and specific. He is only concerned that they are presented well and sound good to the audience.¹⁰⁰ These ideas buttress the claim that Reagan largely sacrifices content for showmanship. Thus, one's opinion of Reagan as a rhetor may depend on whether one watches him on television or reads a transcript. One writer who experimented by reading rather than

watching Reagan's 1984 State of the Union Address concluded: "It works! The scales have fallen from my eyes. What a horrible old bilgemeister he is."¹⁰¹ These shortcomings illustrated by Reagan's first seven State of the Union messages may have grave implications for our government and our nation.

The net effect of a predominately epideictic State of the Union speech without a corresponding deliberative treatment of the nation's problems is a foggy view of our nation's condition and a distorted picture of the future. Granted, Reagan's State of the Union messages are eloquent celebrations of American spirit and character. But when the problems at hand are dealt with by transforming the address into a "national pep talk"¹⁰² with policy initiatives "sunk in a swamp of schmaltz,"¹⁰³ our nation largely suffers. What becomes of positive legislative change when our President reduces himself to the halftime football coach who tells his team in the locker room that "they can do it" without offering specific strategies for "doing it"? What becomes of honest assessments and needed presidential directions when the voices of our Founding Fathers are subordinated to the voice of the First Lady? At what point does our nation draw the line at changes which are "more rhetorical than substantive?"¹⁰⁴ What becomes of the nation's realistic perception of our country's condition when, as the Democrats alleged in their televised response to the 1987 State of the Union address, there is a "gap between the rhetoric and the reality?"¹⁰⁵ What happens to a country in which "the rhetoric tailored for television is employed for the daily decisions of

government?"¹⁰⁶ Finally, what lies ahead for our great nation when "it's not easy for the people to judge the State of the Union in these television days?"¹⁰⁷

Broadly speaking, the United States cannot progress if the President does not fulfill the deliberative nature of the State of the Union address. Reagan's epideictic rhetoric and ceremonial invocations of America's greatness did little to make our lives substantially better in the long-run. Without deliberative rhetoric that is thorough, clear, honest, and expedient; the State of the Union address is reduced to "unequal political propaganda."¹⁰⁸ In effect, the crisis in epideixis leads to a condition in which "we no longer insist that the president's words mean what they appear to say."¹⁰⁹ Without presidential truth and frankness in assessing our country's past, present, and future; the annual ceremony becomes almost meaningless. Call me an idealist, but I would much prefer some substance with my style, some policy with my pride, some deliberative rhetoric with my epideictic. Ronald Reagan's beautiful State of the Union addresses were successful from an epideictic perspective; however, didn't the Framers of our Constitution have more in mind when they entrusted the President with this powerful responsibility? If our leader will not accurately and thoroughly assess our country's condition and offer substantial strategies for coping with current problems, then who will? I take comfort in knowing that at least one writer agrees with this point of view, even if that author is the

pseudonymous Jeremiah Baruch, who wrote:

What if the "Great Communicator" dropped the rhetorical flourishes and euphemistic vocabulary and set about to convince Congress in a straight-forward fashion? Is there still a place for the considered presentation and reasoned discourse that would allow the public to understand the administration's agenda and judge whether or not it is in the national interest?¹¹⁰

I would most certainly hope so.

ENDNOTES

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4. Boykin, p. 1.
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6. Boykin, p. 2.
7. Celeste Michelle Condit, "The Functions of Epideictic: The Boston Massacre Orations as Exemplar," Communication Quarterly, Fall 1985, 288.
8. Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, The Rhetorical Act (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1982), 161.
9. These authors were all described in Condit's above cited work, pp. 284-285.
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16. Aram Bakshian, quoted by Morton Kondracke, "Gag Lines," The New Republic, 21 February 1983, 9.

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24. Rosellini, p. 8.

25. Rosellini, p. 8.

26. Boykin, p. 5.

27. Condit, pp. 284-299.

28. Condit, p. 288.

29. Condit, p. 288.

30. Condit, p. 289.

31. Condit, p. 289.

32. Condit, p. 290.

33. Kondracke, "Gag Lines," p. 9.

34. Tom Wicker, "Mr. Reagan's Lemonade," New York Times, 27 January 1984, sec. 1, p. 27.

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37. Reston, "State of the Union?," p. 23.

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